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Review of the book, Library Assessment in Higher Education by Joseph R. Matthews

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Library Assessment in Higher Education. By Joseph R. Matthews. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. 146p. \$45.00. ISBN 13:978-1-59158-531-2.

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Joe Matthews has served as a consultant to many libraries and local governments in the fields of automation planning, library information systems, strategic planning, management, and the evaluation and assessment of library services. He also teaches at the San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science. He has had scores of monographs published during his career, dating back to the 1970s.

Library Assessment in Higher Education deals with assessment broadly. It does not attempt to address the issues involved in evaluating or assessing specific library services. A subsequent volume by the same author, *The Evaluation and Measurement of Library Services*, (also published by Libraries Unlimited in 2007) focuses on the need for libraries to combine traditional library input and output measures with evaluation techniques and specific tools that concentrate more on assessing user satisfaction, enabling managers to improve, and not just measure, library services.

The first two chapters of *Library Assessment in Higher Education* introduce the reader to the recent growth in higher education of a culture of assessment and mission (or purpose) statements at colleges and universities and their libraries. The third chapter reviews some of the theories or models of how students change while in college, including the Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model developed by Alexander Astin in the 1980s.

Assessing student learning outcomes is the topic of Chapter 4 and Matthews does an effective job of contextualizing higher education accreditation and describing various levels at which students' work can be evaluated with the goal of improving how and what they learn. These levels include the individual student level, the course level, the departmental level, and the college or university level. Matthews also addresses the two major types of assessment measures: direct and indirect. In the case of direct measures, students' actual work is critiqued using techniques like standardized tests, juried reviews, and licensing exams. Indirect measures include methods like surveys, exit interviews, retention rates, graduation rates, and length of time to graduate.

The library's role in the educational process is taken up in Chapter 5. Without hesitation, Matthews points out the difficulty in establishing a positive correlation between library use and a student's academic growth and success. Insofar as many academic librarians struggle with this dilemma, Matthews' review of the literature on this topic is particularly interesting. He looks first at a university's investment in, and student use of, physical resources, citing studies where no statistically significant correlation, or at best a weak positive relationship, was found between an institution's library resources and undergraduate student success. Even more thought-provoking is the number of studies Matthews cites where undergraduate students' library use did not have a significant

bearing on academic success. In other studies, he points out, use of the library's physical collections by undergraduates was found to be very low.

Matthews then turns to the evaluation of library instruction and information literacy programs, categorizing these efforts as opinion surveys, knowledge and/or skills testing, behavior observation, and retention. On these topics, Matthews points out the need for librarians to better relate bibliographic instruction and information literacy training with academic performance, lifelong learning, and career success. After a quick look at evaluating reference services, user satisfaction surveys (and LibQUAL+ in particular) are described. The author concludes Chapter 5 with the observation that neither customer satisfaction surveys, accreditation self-studies, nor changes in the library as place have enabled libraries to significantly move beyond resource measures to effectively address to what extent libraries influence faculty-student interactions and improved student interpersonal life, both of which appear to be predictors of student academic success.

Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with assessing the quality and productivity of campus researchers and the library's impact on the research environment. Various research productivity models are discussed as well as individual, institutional, and departmental attributes related to research productivity. An academic library's ability to determine and communicate how it is contributing to its institution's research mission is becoming increasingly important. The author calls for more cost-benefit studies and cites a relatively recent contingent valuation study as a step in the right direction.

The book concludes with a chapter on the development of an academic library assessment plan consisting of four continuous, circular steps: planning; implementation; evaluation; and improvement. The critical piece of planning is aligning the library's mission and assessment plan with those of its college or university. Implementation should include appropriate assessment measures and the importance of measuring the library's contributions to student learning and the campus research mission. Once data is gathered and evaluated, it can be compared with peer libraries, but a library assessment plan is ultimately a process for measuring how the library is contributing to desired campus outcomes and improving those contributions over time.

Library Assessment in Higher Education complements *Outcomes Assessment in Higher Education: Views and Perspectives*, edited by Peter Hernon and Robert Dugan and published by Libraries Unlimited in 2004. It joins a number of other monographs in the growing field of performance measurement and appraisal in academic libraries and provides up-to-date coverage of the evolving efforts in this important area of library research and practice.